WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

receiving a first synonym list from a user, the first synonym list including a first text string and a second text string;

receiving a second synonym list from the user, the second synonym list including a third text string and a fourth text string;

executing a database query based on the first synonym list and the second synonym list to produce a query result, the query result identifying a first document and a second document;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the first document to contribute to a first sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the first document to contribute to a second sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the second document to contribute to a third sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the second document to contribute to a fourth sum;

transmitting data indicative of a chart based on the first sum, the second sum, the third sum, and the fourth sum;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the first document using a first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the second document using the first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string

in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user.

2.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

ranking the first document higher than the second document if

(i) the first sum is non-zero;

(ii) the second sum is non-zero; and

(iii) at least one of the third sum and the fourth sum is zero.

3.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

determining a first score associated with the first document, the first score being based on a fifth sum, the fifth sum being based on a first logarithm and a second logarithm, the first logarithm being based on the first sum, the second logarithm being based on the second sum;

determining a second score associated with the second document, the second score being based on a sixth sum, the sixth sum being based on a third logarithm and a fourth logarithm, the third logarithm being based on the third sum, the fourth logarithm being based on the fourth sum; and

ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score.

4.   A method as defined in claim 3, wherein ranking the first document relative to the second document based on the comparison of the first score and the second score comprises ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score if a first number of zero count elements associated with the first document is equal to a second number of zero count elements associated with the second document.

5.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the first document comprises a patent and the second document comprises a patent, the method further comprising:

hiding a first patent number associated with the first document from the user;

hiding a second patent number associated with the second document from the user; and

revealing the first patent number and the second patent number to the user in response to receiving a purchase command from the user.

6.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the first document comprises a patent and the second document comprises a patent, the method further comprising:

hiding a first patent number associated with the first document from the user;

hiding a second patent number associated with the second document from the user; and

revealing the first patent number and the second patent number to the user in response to receiving the first patent number and the second patent number from the user.

7.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a patent number from the user;

retrieving a third document based on the patent number;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the third document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the third document to contribute to a fifth sum; and

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the third document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the third document to contribute to a sixth sum, wherein transmitting data indicative of the chart includes transmitting data based on the fifth sum and the sixth sum.

8.   A method as defined in claim 7, wherein the third document is associated with a rank that would not be included in the chart, but for receiving the patent number

associated with the third document from the user.

9. A method as defined in claim 7, further comprising:

highlighting at least one of the first text string and the second text string in the third document using the first color and highlighting at least one of the third text string and the fourth text string in the third document using the second color to create a third highlighted document; and

delivering the third highlighted document to the user.

10. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising receiving a patent number, wherein the query result excludes a patent document because the patent document is associated with the patent number.

11. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising suggesting a synonym to the user based on an electronic thesaurus.

12. A method as defined in claim 11, further comprising:

retrieving a first plurality of synonyms associated with the first text string;

retrieving a second plurality of synonyms associated with the second text string;

retrieving a third plurality of synonyms associated with the third text string;

retrieving a fourth plurality of synonyms associated with the fourth text string;

determining a first subset of synonyms based on the first plurality of synonyms and the second plurality of synonyms, wherein a first member of the first subset is selected over a first non-selected synonym because the first member is in the first plurality of synonyms and the second plurality of synonyms, and the first non-selected synonym is not in the second plurality of synonyms;

determining a second subset of synonyms based on the third plurality of synonyms and the fourth plurality of synonyms, wherein a second member of the second subset is selected over a second non-selected synonym because the second member is in the third plurality of synonyms and the fourth plurality of synonyms, and the second non-

selected synonym is not in the fourth plurality of synonyms; and

causing at least a portion of the first subset of synonyms and at least a portion of the second subset of synonyms to be displayed to a prior art searcher.

13.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the first synonym list and the second synonym list are in a first language, and the first synonym list and the second synonym list are translated to a second language prior to executing the database query.

14.   A method as defined in claim 13, wherein the second language is determined by comparing content of the first document to a plurality of words in the second language.

15.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user comprises transmitting the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user via the Internet.

16.   A method as defined in claim 15, wherein the first highlighted document includes a cover page, the cover page including a graphical representation of the first sum and the second sum.

17.   A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the first highlighted document and the cover page are part of the same PDF file.

18.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein transmitting the data indicative of the chart comprises transmitting data indicative of at least one of a numerical chart and a graphical chart.

19.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein transmitting the data indicative of the chart comprises transmitting data to display the first text string adjacent to a bar

which graphically represents the first sum.

20.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein transmitting the data indicative of the chart comprises transmitting data indicative of a bar graph, wherein the bar graph includes numerical values indicative of the first sum, the second sum, the third sum, and the fourth sum.

21.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein highlighting at least one of the first text string and the second text string in the first document using the first color and highlighting at least one of the third text string and the fourth text string in the first document using the second color to create the first highlighted document comprises highlighting a page description file (PDF).

22.   A method as defined in claim 21, wherein the PDF is a searchable PDF.

23.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein highlighting at least one of the first text string and the second text string in the first document using the first color and highlighting at least one of the third text string and the fourth text string in the first document using the second color to create the first highlighted document comprises highlighting a hypertext markup language file (HTML).

24.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user comprises mailing a hard copy of the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user.

25.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein delivering the first highlighted document to the user comprises delivering a searchable PDF file, the searchable PDF file being generated from a patent image file.

26.   A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the first document, the second document, the first highlighted document, and the second highlighted document comprise electronic documents.

27.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising receiving a query date, wherein the query result excludes a patent document because the patent document is associated with a filing date that is after the query date.

28.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

determining a shortest distance in the first document from one of the first text string and the second text string to one of the third text string and the fourth text string; and

indicating the shortest distance to the user.

29.   A method as defined in claim 28, further comprising amending the first document to indicate the location of the shortest distance to the user.

30.   A method as defined in claim 28, wherein the distance is measured in words.

31.   A method as defined in claim 28, wherein the distance is measured in physical distance across the first document.

32.   A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising adding a watermark to the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document before delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user.

33.   A method as defined in claim 32, wherein the watermark comprises a website address.

34. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising receiving a patent attorney registration number and using the patent attorney registration number to automatically complete a user input box.

35. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising receiving a third synonym list from the user, the third synonym list including at least one text string, wherein the first document does not include any of the at least one text string in the third synonym list.

36. A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

receiving a first synonym list from a user, the first synonym list including a first text string and a second text string;

receiving a second synonym list from the user, the second synonym list including a third text string and a fourth text string;

executing a database query based on the first synonym list and the second synonym list to produce a query result, the query result identifying a first document and a second document;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the first document to contribute to a first sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the first document to contribute to a second sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the second document to contribute to a third sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the second document to contribute to a fourth sum;

determining a first score associated with the first document, the first score being

based on a fifth sum, the fifth sum being based on a first logarithm and a second logarithm, the first logarithm being based on the first sum, the second logarithm being based on the second sum;

determining a second score associated with the second document, the second score being based on a sixth sum, the sixth sum being based on a third logarithm and a fourth logarithm, the third logarithm being based on the third sum, the fourth logarithm being based on the fourth sum; and

ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score.

37.   A method as defined in claim 36, wherein ranking the first document relative to the second document based on the comparison of the first score and the second score comprises ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score if a first number of zero count elements associated with the first document is equal to a second number of zero count elements associated with the second document.

38.   A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

receiving data indicative of a patent claim from a user;

receiving data indicative of at least a first claim element and a second claim element selected from the patent claim;

executing a database query based on the first claim element and the second claim element to produce a query result, the query result including a first document and a second document;

determining the number of occurrences of the first claim element in the first document to contribute to a first sum;

determining the number of occurrences of the second claim element in the first document to contribute to a second sum;

determining the number of occurrences of the first claim element in the second document to contribute to a third sum;

determining the number of occurrences of the second claim element in the second document to contribute to a fourth sum;

transmitting data indicative of a chart based on the first sum, the second sum, the third sum, and the fourth sum;

highlighting a plurality of occurrences of the first claim element in the first document using a first color and highlighting a plurality of occurrences of the second claim element in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document;

highlighting a plurality of occurrences of the first claim element in the second document using the first color and highlighting a plurality of occurrences of the second claim element in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the user.

39.   A method as defined in claim 38, wherein receiving the data indicative of the patent claim from the user comprises receiving a text string representing the patent claim.

40.   A method as defined in claim 38, wherein receiving the data indicative of the patent claim from the user comprises receiving a patent number.

41.   A method as defined in claim 40, wherein receiving the data indicative of the patent claim from the user comprises receiving a claim number associated with the patent number.

42.   A method as defined in claim 41, wherein receiving the data indicative of at least the first claim element and the second claim element selected from the patent claim comprises receiving a word selection from the user.

43. A method as defined in claim 38, further comprising:

determining a first score associated with the first document, the first score being based on a fifth sum, the fifth sum being based on a first logarithm and a second logarithm, the first logarithm being based on the first sum, the second logarithm being based on the second sum;

determining a second score associated with the second document, the second score being based on a sixth sum, the sixth sum being based on a third logarithm and a fourth logarithm, the third logarithm being based on the third sum, the fourth logarithm being based on the fourth sum; and

ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score.

44. A method as defined in claim 43, wherein ranking the first document relative to the second document based on the comparison of the first score and the second score comprises ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score if a first number of zero count elements associated with the first document is equal to a second number of zero count elements associated with the second document.

45. A method as defined in claim 38, wherein highlighting the first claim element in the second document using the first color and highlighting the second claim element in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document comprises highlighting a searchable page description file (PDF).

46. A method as defined in claim 38, wherein the first document is a patent and the second document is a patent, the method further comprising:

hiding a first patent number associated with the first document from the user until a purchase command is received from the user; and

hiding a second patent number associated with the second document from the user

until the purchase command is received from the user.

47. A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

storing first information associated with a first prior art searcher and second information associated with a second prior art searcher;

receiving an invention description via the Internet;

receiving a category selection associated with the invention description;

selecting the first prior art searcher based on the category selection and the first information associated with the first prior art searcher; and

routing the invention description to the first prior art searcher in response to selecting the first prior art searcher.

48. A method as defined in claim 47, wherein the first prior art searcher comprises at least one of a prior art searching business and a prior art searching agent.

49. A method as defined in claim 47, wherein receiving the invention description comprises receiving a first synonym list indicative of a first claim element and a second synonym list indicative of a second claim element.

50. A method as defined in claim 47, wherein receiving the invention description comprises receiving a plurality of sentences.

51. A method as defined in claim 47, wherein receiving the invention description comprises receiving a diagram.

52. A method as defined in claim 47, wherein receiving the category selection associated with the invention description comprises receiving data indicative of at least one of (i) electrical technology, (ii) software technology, (iii) mechanical technology, (iv) chemical technology, and (v) biological technology.

53.   A method as defined in claim 47, further comprising:

routing the invention description to the second prior art searcher;

receiving feedback information associated with the first prior art searcher from the user; and

adjusting a variable associated with the first prior art searcher based on the feedback information.

54.   A method as defined in claim 53, wherein selecting the first prior art searcher is further based on the variable.

55.   A method as defined in claim 54, wherein receiving feedback information associated with the first prior art searcher from the user comprises receiving an indication that a first set of search results associated with the first prior art searcher was preferred over a second set of search results associated with the second prior art searcher.

56.   A method as defined in claim 47, further comprising:

highlighting at least one instance of a first text string and at least one instance of a second text string in a first document using a first color and highlighting at least one instance of a third text string and at least one instance of a fourth text string in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in a second document using the first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to a user.

57.   A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

storing first routing information associated with a first prior art searcher and second routing information associated with a second prior art searcher;

receiving an invention description via the Internet;

selecting the first prior art searcher instead of the second prior art searcher based on a predefined criteria; and

routing the invention description to the first prior art searcher in response to selecting the first prior art searcher.

58.　A method as defined in claim 57, further comprising:

receiving feedback information associated with the first prior art searcher from a user; and

adjusting a variable associated with the first prior art searcher based on the feedback information, wherein selecting the first prior art searcher is based on the variable.

59.　A method as defined in claim 58, wherein receiving feedback information associated with the first prior art searcher from the user comprises receiving an indication that a first set of search results associated with the first prior art searcher and the invention description was preferred over a second set of search results associated with the second prior art searcher and the invention description.

60.　A method as defined in claim 57, further comprising:

highlighting at least one instance of a first text string and at least one instance of a second text string in a first document using a first color and highlighting at least one instance of a third text string and at least one instance of a fourth text string in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in a second document using the first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to

a user.

61.   A method of displaying a prior art search website, the method comprising:

storing first data indicative of a first advertisement associated with a first law firm business and second data indicative of a second advertisement associated with a first non-law firm business;

receiving data identifying a first user of the prior art search website;

determining that the first user is employed by a second law firm business;

displaying the second advertisement associated with the first non-law firm business to the first user in response to determining that the first user is employed by the second law firm business;

receiving data identifying a second user of the prior art search website;

determining that the second user is employed by a second non-law firm business; and

displaying the first advertisement associated with the first law firm business to the second user in response to determining that the second user is employed by the second non-law firm business.

62.   A method as defined in claim 61, further comprising:

receiving a first synonym list from a third user, the first synonym list including a first text string and a second text string;

receiving a second synonym list from the third user, the second synonym list including a third text string and a fourth text string;

executing a database query based on the first synonym list and the second synonym list to produce a query result, the query result identifying a first document and a second document;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the first document to contribute to a first sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the first document and a

number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the first document to contribute to a second sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the second document to contribute to a third sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the second document to contribute to a fourth sum;

transmitting data indicative of a chart based on the first sum, the second sum, the third sum, and the fourth sum;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the first document using a first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document, the first color being different than the second color;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the second document using the first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the third user.

63.   A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

receiving a first word and a second word associated with a first claim element;

receiving a third word and a fourth word associated with a second claim element;

retrieving a first plurality of synonyms associated with the first word;

retrieving a second plurality of synonyms associated with the second word;

determining a first subset of synonyms based on the first plurality of synonyms and the second plurality of synonyms, wherein a first member of the first subset is

selected over a first non-selected synonym because the first member is in the first plurality of synonyms and the second plurality of synonyms, and the first non-selected synonym is not in the second plurality of synonyms;

determining a second subset of synonyms based on the third plurality of synonyms and the fourth plurality of synonyms, wherein a second member of the second subset is selected over a second non-selected synonym because the second member is in the third plurality of synonyms and the fourth plurality of synonyms, and the second non-selected synonym is not in the fourth plurality of synonyms; and

causing at least a portion of the first subset of synonyms and at least a portion of the second subset of synonyms to be displayed to a prior art searcher.

64.   A method as defined in claim 63, further comprising:

receiving a first synonym list from the prior art searcher, the first synonym list including a first text string and a second text string;

receiving a second synonym list from the prior art searcher, the second synonym list including a third text string and a fourth text string;

executing a database query based on the first synonym list and the second synonym list to produce a query result, the query result identifying a first document and a second document;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the first document to contribute to a first sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the first document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the first document to contribute to a second sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the first text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the second text string in the second document to contribute to a third sum;

adding a number of occurrences of the third text string in the second document and a number of occurrences of the fourth text string in the second document to

contribute to a fourth sum;

transmitting data indicative of a chart based on the first sum, the second sum, the third sum, and the fourth sum;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the first document using a first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the first document using a second color to create a first highlighted document, the first color being different than the second color;

highlighting at least one instance of the first text string and at least one instance of the second text string in the second document using the first color and highlighting at least one instance of the third text string and at least one instance of the fourth text string in the second document using the second color to create a second highlighted document; and

delivering the first highlighted document and the second highlighted document to the prior art searcher.

65.   A method as defined in claim 64, further comprising:

determining a first score associated with the first document, the first score being based on a fifth sum, the fifth sum being based on a first logarithm and a second logarithm, the first logarithm being based on the first sum, the second logarithm being based on the second sum;

determining a second score associated with the second document, the second score being based on a sixth sum, the sixth sum being based on a third logarithm and a fourth logarithm, the third logarithm being based on the third sum, the fourth logarithm being based on the fourth sum; and

ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score.

66.   A method as defined in claim 65, wherein ranking the first document relative to the second document based on the comparison of the first score and the second

score comprises ranking the first document relative to the second document based on a comparison of the first score and the second score if a first number of zero count elements associated with the first document is equal to a second number of zero count elements associated with the second document.

67.   A method of searching for prior art, the method comprising:

receiving a first synonym list and a second synonym list from a user, the first synonym list being designated as representing a broad scope of a first claim element, the second synonym list being designated as representing a narrow scope of the first claim element;

receiving a third synonym list and a fourth synonym list from the user, the third synonym list being designated as representing a broad scope of a second claim element, the fourth synonym list being designated as representing a narrow scope of the second claim element;

executing a first database query based on a first combination of words from the first synonym list and the third synonym list to produce a first query result, the first combination of words excluding words from the second synonym list and the fourth synonym list, the first query result including a score;

comparing the score to a threshold; and

executing a second database query based on a second combination of words from the first synonym list, the second synonym list, the third synonym list, and the fourth synonym list to produce a second query result.

68.   A method as defined in claim 67, further comprising receiving the threshold and a preferred number of documents from the user.

69.   A method as defined in claim 67, wherein the score is based on a logarithm of a total number of occurrences of a plurality of words representing the first claim element.